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Date: Tuesday, November 20, 2018 11:24:44 AM

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The Progressive Synopticon

By Victor Davis Hanson|
November 18th, 2018

In the post-election aftermath, Republicans are wondering about how they can capture that missing 2-5 percent of the electorate that lost them the House of Representatives.

Could they pry away 40 percent of the institutionalized Democratic Latino vote on delivery of a full-employment economy of rising wages?

Can they win over 20 percent of the African-American electorate on the basis of more jobs and less competition from illegal immigrants?

Can Trump tone down his *ad hominem* invective and tweeting to reassure an additional 10 percent of independent and middle-class suburban women that his national security agenda, free-market prosperity, traditionalism, law-and-order, and national sovereignty policies ensure greater tranquility, safety, and opportunity—even if they are not packaged in the manner of his more mellifluous and vacuous "presidential" predecessor?

No Escaping the Culture Wars

Republicans, in deer-in-the-headlights-style, appear shocked that they are increasingly prone to winning the vote on Election Day only to lose it in the ensuing weeks when absentee ballots and what-not filter in with astounding Democratic majorities. Someone is spending a lot of money to get the absentee voting ballot out, correctly marked, and returned. And whatever that "lot" is, it is killing Republican candidates.

Yet there is a larger obstacle to achieving that long-term 51 percent Trump solution along with the shorter-term strategy of matching Democratic absentee ballots with Republican absentee ballots. Conservatives have *lost entirely* the culture and establishment wars. The result is that they are besieged by a circle of hostile progressive, but quite establishment institutions that are relentless.

Imagine the traditionalist as living in synopticon—a suspect that is the target of 24/7 viewing, indoctrination, and conditioning by progressive auditors. In other words, a 40-45 percent minority of

Americans is relentlessly lectured, sermonized, demonized, and neutered by a 360- degree ring of prying institutional overseers.

There is no escape. There is no respite. There is no quarter given.

The media has become an extension of the progressive movement, partly because its farm teams are the universities and the upper-middle class suburban professional classes. Journalists, such as Jim Rutenberg and Christiane Amanpour, concede they can no longer stay neutral in the era of Trump—"neutral" in the sense that old partisans of a bygone age like Tom Brokaw, Peter Jennings, and Dan Rather were careful to mask their progressivism on the air.

Not now. The major networks and public affiliates are proudly overt in their efforts to oppose conservative traditionalism often defined (for now) as the agenda of Donald Trump—in 93 percent negative coverage fashion, as is the case with MSNBC/NBC and CNN according to the liberal Shorenstein Center.

Conservatives believe Fox is a powerful counterweight. It may be, but it is one that is surrounded and overwhelmed by liberal networks and state media. After all, Fox is only one of about six corporate conglomerates that control almost 90 percent of televised and print news.

The masters of our social media and Internet universe are the most insidiously partisan. Open your laptop or power on your smartphone, and you meet their shadow personas nonstop. It is not just that the smug class of Menlo Park and Palo Alto censor and disallow posts, podcasts, and messaging along partisan lines, or that a search engine's headers and footers are advertisements for a new progressive America. It is that social media has also been on the vanguard of redefining the Democratic Party, from Hubert Humphrey's old workers party to a pyramid of the very wealthy overseeing a government-subsidized underclass.

Never has the country seen wealth on the magnitude of the fortunes of Jeff Bezos, Michael Bloomberg, Warren Buffett, or Mark Zuckerberg—and an array of high-tech, finance, and marketing grandees. Many can spend $50 million in an election and either never miss the gift, or at least make it up in a few weeks. Their apparent long-term aim seems to be to change the conditions of America to ensure that others, and newer versions of their earlier selves, would do worse than they have

done. The earth can only afford to allow so many hilltop estates, private jets, fleets of cars, and lavish playthings to so few green, open-minded, activist, wise, and committed progressives, who need all these exemptions to save us.

Escape! No Escape!

Popular culture—from rap and pop music to corporate advertising—is progressive hip, a sort of non-ending assumption that the Life of Julia and Pajama Boy are the way of America. Pick up a comic book, download a tune, or watch Ellen on airport TV: the messaging is all the same—the old creaking brontosauruses are heading for the tar pits, and being replaced by far cooler, better, and smarter youthful raptors—even as the society grows ever more callous, indebted, factional, and dysfunctional, from the now normal tarmac nightmares to going into the DMV. It is hard to find a TV sitcom, a song, or a billboard that is not in your face about something.

Maybe one can turn then to sports either to find at least an escape from 360-degree progressive surveillance? No luck there. If an NBA figure were to speak out as conservatively as the vast majority of owners, players, and coaches do progressively, his career for all practical purposes would be over—and so none do—even if there are any who are not genuinely progressive. Ditto the “take the knee” NFL. From the National Anthem pregame observance to the Super Bowl halftime show, professional football is now mostly politicized entertainment. It is only apolitical in the sense that everyone is assumed to be on the same progressive team. ESPN analysts talk as if they are MSNBC and CNN news anchor leftovers.

There is no real need to reference Hollywood. Its movies remain as banal as they are partisan. We know the usual script: a good looking social justice warrior ferrets out a polluting corporation, a cancer-causing drug company, a CIA orchestrated massacre abroad, an internal right-wing FBI-led coup, and then allies with crusading journalists, courageous environmentalists, or undaunted social activists. Usually their suit-clad corporate villains employ as hit men and foot soldiers the usual white-male goons, authenticated with Russian, South African, or southern drawl accents, and various fascist tattoos, scars, and missing teeth.

Both low-brow and high-brow children’s animation and cartoons are so frequently about a once smiley old tree choking on corporate-fed stinky air, a fishy swimming for his life in a climate-changed boiling

sea, or some sort of beetle, mouse, or bunny trying to get home to protected green spaces or federal wetlands, as it dodges greedy clear-cutting ax-men, chain-sawers, psycho NRA hunters with assault weapons, or soulless huge corporate agriculture combines.

Parents have few options to the progressive university octopus. The campus's explicit message is that hyphenated "studies" courses must correct the incorrect thinking that students bring with them, brainwashed as they are by their parents, families, churches, and communities.

If students learn nothing about the old dead white men of the *Iliad*, Latin, Descartes, the Renaissance, Beethoven, or Melville, apparently all the better, given that ignorance spawns arrogance. And arrogance is necessary to push one's partisan ignorance on others.

The real tragedy is not that today's professor is biased, but that he is incompetent (ranting is no substitute for learning, even as gender or ethnic studies are not real scholarly subjects). The English professor so often now does not know much Shakespeare, the classics professor does not always read Thucydides in Greek, and the art historian can have little idea what the Hudson River School is.

Indebted Futures

More implicitly, the university accepts that its huge administrative superstructure, swelled by "diversity" and "inclusion" six-figure fixers, ensures that federally subsidized tuition goes up higher than the rate of inflation, and that students leave (not always with diplomas) with massive debt. Their degrees cannot guarantee that encumbered students can even pay the interest on their educational debts.

No wonder that a generation will have to postpone marriage, put off child-rearing, and live as perpetual adolescents, and urban apartment-renters. Their bitterness over poverty, and their angst at being uncompensated for supposedly brilliant college degrees often translate into progressive solidarity.

Foundations—such as those established by the Fords, Guggenheims, Mellons, and Rockefellers—fund liberal groups and research almost exclusively. The subtext seems to be that the billions piled up in tax-free foundations should be used to ensure that no one else can make a million. A man worth a billion is deemed a valuable progressive, one worth a mere million more often a counter-revolutionary danger.

There are few reticent “wise men” left, senior veterans of politics and government who in their later years pop up to give the country non-partisan but sober advice on war and peace, economic pitfalls, or geostrategic warnings. So many seek legacies as progressives, given that creeping progressivism ensures a final PBS, NPR, or *New York Times* encomium.

Past presidents and first ladies? They no longer stay out politics, resting at the “ranch.” The getting-rich Obamas follow the Clinton model and are everywhere—he on the stump blasting Trump as a liar and taking credit for economic growth that he never achieved; she reminding the country of its culpability for Trump with the usual whining that even her global fame and multi-millions are somehow not compensation enough for what she suffered for all of us.

When you get up in the morning until you go to bed at night, you are on stage, and a progressive synopticon is everywhere around you.

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